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No. OFFICE OF THE CLERK

In the
Supreme Court of the United States

TONYA HARRIS, as administratrix of the
Estate of decedent Torris Harris,
Petitioner,

v.

CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, et al.,
Respondents.

On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the United
States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- I. Whether the Court of Appeals exercised its supervisory power in a way that conflicted with Petitioner's right of due process by denying Petitioner's statutory right to appeal in arbitrarily applying its waiver rule and exceptions?
- II. In an issue expressly reserved by this Court in its prior decision in *Thomas v. Arn*, what standard must a Court of Appeals apply in considering exceptions to its waiver rule?
- III. Whether the District Court committed plain error in finding Petitioner's former attorney had apparent authority to settle her suit where the controlling authority from the State Court of last resort holds that attorneys do not have apparent authority?
- IV. Whether the Court of Appeals acted in direct contravention to prior holdings of this Court and overstepped the bounds of its duty under *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure* 52(a) in weighing evidence in the record *de novo* and making factual findings?

RULE 29.6 STATEMENT

No corporations or subsidiaries are involved in this case.

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PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioners respectfully petition for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in this case.

OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is published at 137 Fed. Appx. 788 (6th Cir. 2005). A petition for rehearing was denied without opinion. The unpublished order was issued on September 29, 2005.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the United States Court of Appeals was issued on June 15, 2005. (App. at 3a). A petition for rehearing and for rehearing *en banc* was denied on September 29, 2005. (App. at 1a). This Court has jurisdiction over this petition under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

The provision of the United States Constitution relevant to this petition is the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment, which provides: "No person shall be . . . deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law . . ."

The statute relevant to this petition is Section (b)(1) of the Federal Magistrates Act, which provides:

(1) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary—(A) a judge may designate a magistrate

[magistrate judge] to hear and determine any pretrial matter pending before the court, except a motion for injunctive relief, for judgment on the pleadings, for summary judgment, to dismiss or quash an indictment or information made by the defendant, to suppress evidence in a criminal case, to dismiss or to permit maintenance of a class action, to dismiss for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, and to involuntarily dismiss an action. A judge of the court may reconsider any pretrial matter under this subparagraph (A) where it has been shown that the magistrate's [magistrate judge's] order is clearly erroneous or contrary to law.

(B) a judge may also designate a magistrate [magistrate judge] to conduct hearings, including evidentiary hearings, and to submit to a judge of the court proposed findings of fact and recommendations for the disposition, by a judge of the court, of any motion excepted in subparagraph (A), of applications for posttrial relief made by individuals convicted of criminal offenses and of prisoner petitions challenging conditions of confinement.

(C) the magistrate [magistrate judge] shall file his proposed findings and recommendations under subparagraph (B) with the court and a copy shall forthwith be mailed to all parties.

Within ten days after being served with a copy, any party may serve and file written objections to such proposed findings and recommendations as provided by rules of court. A judge of the court shall make a de novo determination of those portions of the report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made. A judge of the

court may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate [magistrate judge]. The judge may also receive further evidence or recommit the matter to the magistrate [magistrate judge] with instructions. 28 U.S.C. § 636.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This petition seeks review of a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit upholding a decision of the district court dismissing the Petitioner's civil action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

(a) Petitioner believes the decision of the Court of Appeals conflicts with prior decisions of this Court and other circuits holding that a federal court may not exercise its inherent power in a manner that conflicts with Constitutional and statutory provisions. Here, the Court of Appeals denied Due Process to the Petitioner in its arbitrary refusal to apply an exception to its waiver rule. The issue of how appellate courts must apply exceptions to their waiver rules is an issue previously reserved by this Court.

(b) The district court below committed plain error in finding the Petitioner's former attorney had apparent authority to enter into the settlement agreement where controlling precedent in the state court of last resort holds that attorneys do not have apparent authority to compromise a suit.

(c) The Court of Appeals acted in direct conflict with prior holdings of this Court and with *Federal Rule of Civil Procedure* 52(a) as it reviewed the record *de novo* and made its own factual findings. This decision sets a dangerous precedent for appellate courts in overreaching in the scope of their authority to review factual findings under *Rule* 52.

This case arose when Petitioner's son, Torris Harris, suffered death by suffocation at the hands of five City of Chattanooga police officers and two private citizens during a traffic stop.

Petitioner brought suit pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Sometime in or around December of 2003, Ms. Harris' former counsel made a demand to the City of Chattanooga to settle the case for one-hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00). Counsel for the City of Chattanooga responded with a counter-offer of twenty-eight thousand five-hundred dollars (\$28,500.00), and, in a December 18, 2003 letter, Petitioner's former counsel accepted the offer. On or about January 1, 2004, Ms. Harris advised her former counsel that she would not accept the offer, and he wrote to the Defendants advising them that she rejected their offer.

Afterward, the Defendants filed various motions to enforce the purported settlement agreement. The motions were referred to the magistrate judge for an evidentiary hearing, and on February 11, 2004, the magistrate issued a Report and Recommendation, recommending that the District Court enforce the purported agreement. The magistrate found Petitioner did not understand the terms of the settlement agreement. (App. at 25a). The magistrate further found Petitioner's former counsel accepted the settlement on her behalf, finding he had apparent authority to do so, and basing this apparent authority solely on his status as counsel of record for Petitioner. (App. 25a). This finding directly contradicts applicable state law holding attorneys do not have apparent authority to settle a suit, and cannot comprise a matter without the express authority of the client.

On March 3, 2004, the District Court entered an Order adopting the Report and Recommendation. Appellant's former

counsel moved to withdraw on March 14, 2004, and on March 18, 2004, he delivered documents, including the Report and Recommendation and Order, to Petitioner. On March 23, 2004, Petitioner, *pro se*, filed her objections to the Report and Recommendation and motion for reconsideration of the Order adopting the Report and Recommendation.

The District Court considered the objections and motion of the Plaintiff, and denied the same under a *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 60(b) standard in a Memorandum and Order, both dated May 14, 2004.

The issue of the lack of authority of Petitioner's former attorney to comprise the suit on her behalf was properly raised below in Petitioner's objections and motion for reconsideration, and on appeal.

In its opinion, the Court of Appeals held that by failing to timely object to the Magistrate's Report and Recommendation within ten days, the Petitioner waived her right to appeal. In so holding, however, the Court of Appeals ignored a long-standing exception to its waiver rule, which allows appeal where the District Court entertains a late-filed objection. The Court of Appeals premised its departure from this rule on the fact that the District Court viewed the Petitioner's objections under a *Fed.R. Civ. P.* 60 standard, despite there having been at least one prior Sixth Circuit opinion allowing appeal where a late objection was viewed by the District Court under a *Rule* 60 standard.

The Court of Appeals then reviewed the record *de novo* and held that the Petitioner accepted the settlement – a finding not reached by the district court. By reviewing the record *de novo* and making its own factual findings, the Court of

Appeals overstepped the bounds of its authority under *Federal Rule of Civil Procedure* 52(a).

The Sixth Circuit denied Petitioner's request for rehearing and for rehearing en banc without opinion.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

I. This Court Should Grant Certiorari Because The Decision Below Conflicts With Decisions Of This Court And Other Circuits Holding That A Federal Court May Not Exercise Its Supervisory Power In A Way That Conflicts With Constitutional And Statutory Provisions.

A. The Waiver Rule at Issue.

At issue here is a rule, adopted by the Sixth Circuit in *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981), conditioning appeal upon a party filing objections to a magistrate's report within ten days as provided for in 28 U.S.C. § 636 (b)(1).

In *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985), this Court considered the Sixth Circuit's waiver rule and held that "a court of appeals may adopt a rule conditioning appeal, when taken from a district court judgment that adopts a magistrate's recommendation, upon the filing of objections with the district court identifying those issues on which further review is desired. Such a rule, at least when it incorporates clear notice to the litigants and an opportunity to seek an extension of time for filing objections, is a valid exercise of the supervisory power that does not violate either the Federal Magistrate's Act of the Constitution." *Id.* at 155.

This Court noted that because the waiver rule approved by the Court was a nonjurisdictional waiver provision, default could be excused "in the interests of justice," referencing in a footnote *Fed. R. of Crim. Proc.* 52(b), which states that a court may correct plain error despite the failure of a party to object. 474 U.S. at 155.

B. Certiorari is Warranted Where This Court Expressly Reserved the Issue of How Appellate Courts Must Apply Exceptions to the Waiver Rule and Where There is a Split Among the Circuits in Their Application of Exceptions.

In *Thomas*, the Court expressly reserved the issue of how appellate courts must apply exceptions to their waiver rules, stating, "[w]e need not decide at this time what standards the courts of appeals must apply in considering exceptions to their waiver rules." 474 U.S. at 155.

A grant of certiorari by this Court is appropriate where a decision of the court of appeals is predicated upon a point expressly reserved or left undecided in prior decisions of this Court. See, *American Textile Mfrs. Institute v. Donovan*, 452 U.S. 490, 495 (1981); *United States v. Martinez-Fuerte*, 428 U.S. 543, 545 (1976); *El Al Israel Airlines, Ltd. v. Tseng*, 525 U.S. 155, 161-62 (1999).

Since the decision in *Thomas*, there has been a definitive split among the circuits in considering exceptions to their waiver rules.

A grant of certiorari is also appropriate where there is a conflict between decisions of courts of appeals on the same matter. *Supreme Court Rule* 10(a); see also, *Thompson v. Keohane*, 516 U.S. 99, 106 (1995) (certiorari granted where

circuits disagreed "because uniformity among federal courts is important on questions of this order"); *Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. v. Risjord*, 449 U.S. 368, 373 (1981) (certiorari granted "to resolve a conflict among the Circuits on the appealability question" as to certain district court decisions); *Marks v. United States*, 430 U.S. 188, 189 (1977) (certiorari granted "to resolve a conflict in the Circuits").

C. An Appellate Court's Supervisory Power is Invalid Where It Conflicts With Constitutional and Statutory Provisions.

In *Bank of Nova Scotia v. United States*, 487 U.S. 250, 254 (1988), this Court held that a federal court may not invoke its inherent power to circumvent the harmless error inquiry of *Fed. R. Crim. P.* 52, and observed, "[i]t follows that Rule 52 is, in every pertinent respect, as binding as any statute enacted by Congress, and federal courts have no more discretion to disregard the Rule's mandate than they do to disregard constitutional or statutory provisions."

In *United States v. Paynor*, 447 U.S. 727 (1980), this Court ruled that the district court erred when it invoked its inherent power to suppress evidence even though an illegal search did not violate the accused's Fourth Amendment rights, finding that, "[w]ere we to accept this use of the supervisory power, we would confer on the judiciary discretionary power to disregard the considered limitations of the law it is charged with enforcing. We hold that the supervisory power does not extend so far." *Id.* at 737; see also, *Societe Internationale pour Participations Industrielles et Commerciales, S.A. v. Rogers*, 357 U.S. 197, 209 (1958) (rejecting the appellate court's reliance on inherent power to uphold a dismissal of a complaint for failure to comply with a production order, holding, "there are constitutional

limitations upon the power of courts, even in the aid of their own valid purposes, to dismiss an action without affording a party the opportunity for a hearing on the merits of his cause.”).

Indeed, in *Thomas*, 474 U.S. 140, where this Court allowed the waiver rule at issue here, this Court observed, “[e]ven a sensible and efficient use of the supervisory power, however, is invalid if it conflicts with constitutional or statutory provisions. A contrary result ‘would confer on the judiciary discretionary power to disregard the considered limitations of the law it is charged with enforcing.’” *Id.* at 148 (citing *Payner*, 447 U.S. at 737).

The discord among the circuits in considering exceptions to their waiver rules, and as applied by the Sixth Circuit in the manner in which it considers exceptions to its waiver rule, has had the practical effect of denying Due Process to the Petitioner in the instant case.

D. The Sixth Circuit’s Waiver Exceptions.

The Sixth Circuit excuses the waiver provision “in the interest of justice”. *Kelly v. Withrow*, 25 F.3d 363, 366 (6th Cir. 1994), cert. denied, 513 U.S. 1061 (1994); see also, *Kent v. Johnson*, 821 F.2d 1220, 1223 (6th Cir. 1987).

Compliance is also excused in the Sixth Circuit when a district court considers untimely objections. *Patterson v. Mintzes*, 717 F.2d 284 (6th Cir. 1983). In *Patterson*, the Court concluded that, “when written objections to a magistrate’s report are tendered beyond the 10 day period of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), but are nevertheless filed and considered by the district court, the criteria identified in *Walters* in justification of the waiver rule promulgated therein

dissipate and the rule will not apply to bar appellate review.” *Id.* at 286; see also, *Kent*, 821 F.2d at 1223.

The underlying rationale, as explained by the Court in *Patterson* is that, “[t]he district court, rather than the magistrate, is charged with the ultimate responsibility of properly adjudicating the Article III controversy before it. Accordingly, the district court may place upon the magistrate’s recommendation such reliance as is warranted through the ‘exercise of sound judicial discretion.’” *Id.* at 287. (citation omitted).

In *Kent*, 821 F.2d 1220, the court decided to entertain the appeal “in the interests of justice” because the appellant did not receive the report and recommendation until the eleventh day, holding that, “[t]he interests of justice must be weighed on a case by case basis.” *Id.*

E. The Split Among the Circuits in Applying Exceptions to Their Waiver Rules.¹

Like the Sixth Circuit, many other courts have held that where a district court considers a late-filed objection, the court’s waiver rule does not apply. See, *United States v. Robinson*, 30 F.3d 774, 777 (7th Cir. 1994) (holding that its appellate waiver rule would not apply when untimely objections are not “egregiously late” and the opposing party

¹ The Third and Ninth Circuits do not apply an appellate waiver rule to accepted unobjected-to proposed legal conclusions in a magistrate judge’s report. See, *Henderson v. Carlson*, 812 F.2d 874, 878-79 (3d Cir.), cert. denied, 484 U.S. 837 (1987); *Flaten v. Secretary of Health & Human Servs.*, 44 F.3d 1453, 1458 (9th Cir. 1995). The First Circuit has not applied any exceptions to its waiver rule. See, *Davet v. Maccarone*, 973 F.2d 22, 31 (1st Cir. 1992).

has not been prejudiced); see also, *Nabors v. United States*, 929 F.2d 354, 355 (8th Cir. 1990) (holding time was "implicitly enlarged where district court considered untimely objections."); *Grandison v. Moore*, 786 F.2d 146 (3rd Cir. 1986) (remanding trial court's order adopting a magistrate's findings and conclusions in order for district court to consider whether plaintiff adequately justified delay in filing objections).

The Second Circuit has created an exception for *pro se* litigants unless the magistrate's report "explicitly states" that failure to object to the report within ten days will preclude appellate review and specifically cites 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 72, 6(a) and 6(e). *F.D.I.C. v. Hillcrest Associates*, 66 F.3d 566, 569 (2nd Cir. 1995).

Like the Second Circuit, in the Tenth and Fourth Circuits, the rule does not apply to a *pro se* litigant's failure to object when the magistrate's order does not apprise the *pro se* litigant of the consequences of a failure to object. *Moore v. United States*, 950 F.2d 656, 659 (10th Cir. 1991); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841, 846-47 (4th Cir. 1985). The Tenth Circuit also holds the waiver rule "need not be applied when the interests of justice so dictate." *Moore*, 950 F.2d at 659.

The Fifth Circuit and Eighth Circuits have a "plain error" exception. *Douglass v. United Servs. Auto. Ass'n*, 79 F.3d 1415, 1428-1429 (5th Cir. 1996); *Thompson v. Nix*, 897 F.2d 356, 357 (8th Cir. 1990). The Eleventh Circuit reviews accepted unobjected-to proposed factual findings for "plain error or manifest injustice." See, *Resolution Trust Corp. v. Hallmark Builders, Inc.*, 996 F.2d 1144, 1149 (11th Cir. 1993).

F. In this Case, the Arbitrary Application of the Waiver Rule and Exceptions by the Court of Appeals Denied Petitioner Due Process.

In *Thomas*, 474 U.S. at 146, this Court stated that, "[t]he Sixth Circuit has also shown that its [waiver] rule is not jurisdictional by excusing the procedural default in a recent case. See *Patterson v. Mintzes*, supra (considering appeal on merits despite pro se litigant's late filing of objections). We therefore conclude that neither the intent nor the practical effect of the Sixth Circuit's waiver rule is to restrict the court's own jurisdiction."

In the instant case, the Court of Appeals refused Petitioner's appeal, disregarding the court's own exception to its waiver rule, as explained in *Patterson v. Mintzes*, where appeal is allowed if the district court entertains late-filed objections. While recognizing the district court did, in fact, entertain the Petitioner's late-filed objections, the court distinguished *Patterson*, stating, "[t]here the district court considered the untimely objections *on the merits*. *Id.* By contrast, in this case, the district court considered this matter under Rule 60(b) only, not on the merits." (App. at 9a-10a).

However, the Sixth Circuit previously held in *Dunn v. State of Ohio*, 42 F.3d 1388 (6th Cir. 1994), that it would consider an appeal and not apply the waiver rule based upon the *Patterson* exception where, as in this case, the district court considered a late-filed objection under a *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 60(b) standard.

The Court of Appeals' refusal to apply the *Patterson* exception to its waiver rule had the effect of denying the Petitioner her statutory right of appeal. Furthermore, where the court applied its late-filed objection exception in *Dunn* but

not in the instant case, where both cases involved objections reviewed under a *Rule 60* standard, the refusal to hear the Petitioner's appeal was an arbitrary denial of Due Process.

The Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment asserts that no person shall "be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law." The Constitution does not create property interests but instead extends various procedural safeguards to certain interests "that stem from an independent source such as a [federal] law." *Board of Regents v. Roth*, 408 U.S. 564, 577 (1972). A claim of entitlement under federal law, to be enforceable, must be derived from statute or legal rule or through a mutual understanding. *Perry v. Sinderman*, 408 U.S. 493, 601-602 (1972).

When presented with a Due Process challenge, a court must determine, first, whether there has been a deprivation of a property interest, and, if so, what process is due. *Morrissey v. Brewer*, 408 U.S. 471, 481 (1972).

Petitioner's entitlement here is clear because Petitioner's right to appeal is vested in 28 U.S.C. § 1291. Accordingly, because Petitioner possessed a cognizable property interest within the terms of the Fifth Amendment, the Constitution obligated the district court to afford her procedural due process before depriving her of her property in denying her the opportunity to have her appeal heard.

In *Logan v. Zimmerman Brush Co.*, 455 U.S. 422, 437 (U.S. 1982), this Court held that a party's Due Process rights were violated where state arbitrarily failed to convene a hearing within limitations period, thus extinguishing the claim.

By applying an exception to the waiver rule in *Dunn v. State of Ohio*, where the late-objection was considered under a Rule 60 standard, but refusing to do so in the case at bar, without distinction, the Sixth Circuit is arbitrarily applying its waiver rule and exceptions, and thus denying the Petitioner her statutory right to appeal.²

Where there is discord among the decisions of the circuit courts of appeal, and within the Sixth Circuit, in how the courts apply exceptions to their waiver rules, such that the Due Process rights of litigants is being eviscerated by the arbitrary and dissonant application by the appellate courts, this Court should review the issue it previously reserved, of "what standards the courts of appeals *must* apply in considering exceptions to their waiver rules." 474 U.S. at 155 n.15 (emphasis added).

II. This Court Should Grant Certiorari Where The District Court Committed Plain Error.

A grant of certiorari is appropriate here, pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 10(a), because the district court decision below directly conflicts with the controlling authority from the state court of last resort.

² Additionally, as noted above, the Second, Fourth and Tenth Circuits all provide an exception to their waiver rule for *pro se* litigants who do not receive adequate notice of waiver. Here, Petitioner's former attorney withdrew his representation on March 14, 2004, and Petitioner filed her objections, *pro se*, on March 23, 2004, just one day outside the ten days provided under *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 59 for review on the merits of the court's March 3, 2004 Order (when considered with *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 6 time computation), and certainly within ten days of Petitioner's receipt of the decisions from her former attorney on March 18, 2004.

Additionally, the refusal by the Court of Appeals to address the issue of whether the district court committed plain error, and instead reviewing the case *de novo* (as discussed in section III, *infra*.) is a clear departure from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings, and a sanctioning of the district court's own such departure.

This Court has, on many occasions, granted certiorari where there is a question of whether a doubtful determination or plain error was committed below. See, *Kyles v. Whitley*, 514 U.S. 419, 422 (1995); *Arizona v. Maricopa County Medical Society*, 457 U.S. 332, 336 (1982); *New York Transit Authority v. Beazer*, 440 U.S. 568, 571 (1979); *Perma Life Mufflers v. International Parts Corp.*, 392 U.S. 134, 136 (1968); *Williams v. Lee*, 358 U.S. 217, 218 (1959).

In this case, there was plain error committed by the District Court in its finding that the Petitioner's former attorney had apparent authority to settle the lawsuit on her behalf. In determining the enforceability of a settlement agreement, the state law of the state where the purported agreement was entered into is applicable. See, *Zink v. GE Capital Assurance Co.*, 73 Fed. Appx. 858, 861 (6th Cir. 2003). In the case at bar, the alleged Settlement Agreement was entered into in Tennessee, and as such, Tennessee law must apply.

The District Court found the Petitioner's former attorney was clothed with apparent authority. However, Tennessee law leaves attorneys naked as to such authority. It is the client who holds the authority as to whether to settle a matter, and it is the client who must expressly give such authority.

In *Absar v. Jones*, 833 S.W.2d 86, 89-90 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1992), the court held that, "[t]he general rule in Tennessee is

that an attorney cannot surrender substantial rights of a client, including agreeing to dismissal of litigation which permanently bars a client from pursuing his claim, without the express authority of the client." (citing, *Long v. Kirby-Smith*, 292 S.W.2d 216, 222 (Tenn. 1956); *Davis v. Home Insurance Co.*, 155 S.W. 131, 133 (Tenn. 1913)).

In the instant case, the District Court held that the Petitioner never understood the terms of the agreement, holding "the plaintiff herself testified she thought the \$28,500.00 was simply a first installment for \$100,000.00. This mistaken understanding of the settlement amount apparently came from her own attorney's settlement demand, which was rejected, of \$100,000.00." (App. at 25a). The court found that it was the Petitioner's former attorney who accepted the settlement on her behalf, holding that, "the plaintiff clothed her attorney to enter into a settlement on her behalf of all her claims against defendants." (App. at 26a). The opinion of the Magistrate was plain error because the applicable law holds that attorneys do not have apparent authority to settle matters, and that the client must give their express authority to settle a case. As such, the district court below committed plain error in finding that the Petitioner's former counsel had apparent authority to compromise this suit on her behalf.³

³ The district court also committed plain error in finding that the purported Settlement Agreement was met on all material terms as it held, "[Petitioner's former attorney] entered into an agreement with the defendants in which the material but simple terms of the agreement were set." (App. at 25a). Here, the magistrate's analysis stopped with finding the Petitioner's former attorney had apparent authority to settle the suit - which was plain error.

Without the intervention of this Court, the plain error of the court below will lead to a miscarriage of justice in the termination of Petitioner's suit in an unjust compromise to which she never assented.

III. This Court Should Grant Certiorari Where The Court Of Appeals Acted Contrary To Precedent Of This Court And Overstepped The Bounds Of Its Duty Under *Federal Rule of Civil Procedure* 52(a) In Weighing The Evidence *De Novo* And Making Factual Findings.

In the instant case, the Court of Appeals, despite its finding as to waiver, considered the case on its merits, finding against the Petitioner.⁴ In its review of the case, however, the court blatantly overstepped the bounds of its review, in considering the record *de novo* and making factual determinations contrary to that of the district court.⁵

⁴ The court stated that, "[e]ven if we consider the merits of Plaintiff's claims, she cannot prevail." (App. at 10a). The Court of Appeals then made specific, binding holdings in this case. The character of its review makes clear these findings were not dicta. Even if this Court considers the review of the record by the Court of Appeals to be dicta, the deliberate and unrestrained review of the record, *de novo*, so far departed from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings that it warrants review by this Court.

⁵ The panel also improperly found that the Appellant never raised the issue "of the proper law to be applied" below. This is semantics without substance. Taken to its logical conclusion, this holding would throw into question every case in every federal court. It is preposterous to require that a litigant must first raise, as a separate issue, whether the court must apply the proper law. This holding is a clear departure from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings, such that certiorari is warranted under

Supreme Court Rule 10(c) states that certiorari may be granted where a "United States Court of Appeals has decided an important question of federal law in a way that conflicts with relevant decisions of this Court," and the Court has on many occasions undertaken consideration of a case where the decision of a court of appeals appears to have misapplied, misconstrued or misconceived prior precedent of this Court. See, *Elder v. Holloway*, 510 U.S. 510, 515 (1994); *Schlude v. Commissioner*, 372 U.S. 128, 130 (1968); *Wilkinson v. United States*, 365 U.S. 399, 401 (1961); *Upshaw v. United States*, 335 U.S. 410 (1948); *McCandles v. Furlaud*, 296 U.S. 140 (1935).

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 52(a) provides that, "[f]indings of fact shall not be set aside unless clearly erroneous, and due regard shall be given to the opportunity of the trial court to judge of the credibility of the witnesses."⁶

Supreme Court Rule 10(a). A court must always apply the proper law to the substantive issue before it. In the instant case, the Petitioner properly raised the issue of apparent authority, which was the issue below. Application of Tennessee law simply provides the correct solution to the issue. The issue was properly raised below by the appellant in her objections that were considered by the District Court, and on appeal.

⁶ Additionally, the Sixth Circuit holds that the proper standard of review in deciding whether to affirm the district court's decision to uphold a settlement agreement [which was the issue below], is for the Court of Appeals to review the district court's factual findings for clear error and review *de novo* the district court's conclusions of law. *Performance Unlimited, Inc. v. Questar Publishers, Inc.*, 52 F.3d 1373, 1381 (6th Cir. 1995).

This Court has clearly and consistently held that, "[t]he reviewing court oversteps the bounds of its duty under *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 52(a) if it undertakes to duplicate the role of the lower court. 'In applying the clearly erroneous standard to the findings of a district court sitting without a jury, appellate courts must constantly have in mind that their function is not to decide factual issues *de novo*.'" *Anderson v. City of Bessemer City, North Carolina*, 470 U.S. 564, 572 (1983) (citing *Zenith Radio Corp. v. Hazeltine Research, Inc.*, 395 U.S. 100, 123 (1969)).

"[E]ven when the trial judge adopts proposed findings verbatim, the findings are those of the court and may be reversed only if clearly erroneous." *Id.* (citing *United States v. El Paso Natural Gas Co.*, 376 U.S. 651, 656-657 (1964); *United States v. Marine Bancorporation*, 418 U.S. 602, 615, n. 13 (1974)).

In the instant case, the decision of the Court of Appeals is in direct conflict with prior holdings of this Court, and with *Fed. R. Civ. P.* 52(a), as the Court of Appeals reviewed the facts *de novo* and came to a conclusion not reached by the district court.

The Magistrate below held that the Petitioner never understood the terms of the settlement agreement, holding, that the Petitioner had a "mistaken understanding of the settlement amount." (App. at 25a). After finding that the Petitioner did not understand the terms of the agreement, the Magistrate held that, "the plaintiff clothed her attorney with apparent authority to enter into a settlement on her behalf." (App. at 26a).

In its opinion, the Court of Appeals reviewed *de novo* the district court's factual finding that the Petitioner did not

understand the terms of the agreement, holding that, "*in this case, a review of her testimony before the magistrate reflects that the Plaintiff accepted the offer of \$28,500 and later reversed her acceptance,*" and further held, "*it is clear from the record that Plaintiff initially gave [her former counsel] express authority to settle the matter, and then later reversed her position.*" (App. at 12a, 14a) (emphasis added). By making factual findings not made by the district court, the Court of Appeals unabashedly reviewed the record *de novo*, with complete disregard for standard under *Fed. R. Civ. P. 52(a)* and prior holdings of this Court.

Review under *Fed. R. Civ. P. 52(a)*, "plainly does not entitle a reviewing court to reverse the finding of the trier of fact simply because it is convinced that it would have decided the case differently." *Anderson*, 470 U.S. at 572.

By making a finding that the Appellant accepted the offer, which finding the District Court *never* made, the panel abandoned the proper standard of review, and set a dangerous precedent of inserting itself into the role of the district court trier of fact. As such, this Court should reverse the holdings of the Court of Appeals that were based upon an improper *de novo* review of the record.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set out, this Court should grant the petition for writ of certiorari, reverse the judgment of the Court of Appeals and remand for trial.

Respectfully submitted,

Amelia C. Roberts
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Chattanooga, TN 37402
Telephone (423) 266-8400
Facsimile (423) 265-8055
Counsel for Petitioner

APPENDIX A

**THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT**

Case No. 04-5421

[Filed September 29, 2005]

TONYA HARRIS, an Administratrix of)
the Estate of decedent Torris Harris)
Plaintiff-Appellant,)
)
v.)
)
CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, et al.,)
Defendants-Appellees.)

ORDER

**BEFORE: SUHRHEINRICH, BATCHELDER, and
GIBSON,* Circuit Judges.**

The court having received a petition for rehearing en banc, and the petition having been circulated not only to the original panel members but also to all other active judges of

* Hon. John R. Gibson, Senior United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, sitting by designation.

this court, and no judge of this court having requested a vote on the suggestion for rehearing en banc, the petition for rehearing has been referred to the original panel.

The panel has further reviewed the petition for rehearing and concludes that the issues raised in the petition were fully considered upon the original submission and decision of the case. Accordingly, the petition is denied.

ENTERED BY ORDER OF THE COURT

/s/

Leonard Green, Clerk

APPENDIX B

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT**

Case No. 04-5421

[Filed June 15, 2005]

TONYA HARRIS, an Administratrix of the Estate)
of decedent Torris Harris,)
Plaintiff-Appellant;)

v.)

CITY OF CHATTANOOGA;)
JUSTIN MCCOMMON,)
MARTIN PENNY, CHRIS SMITH,)
DAVID ALLEN, MARK SMELTZER,)
City of Chattanooga Police)
Officers, in Their Official and Individual)
Capacities; CHARLES R. KINSEY,)
CHRISTOPHER L. GAYNOR, Private)
Citizens in Their Capacity as Agents for)
the City of Chattanooga and in their)
Individual Capacities,)
Defendants-Appellees.)

OPINION**SUHRHEINRICH, J**

Plaintiff Tonya Harris, individually and as administratrix for the estate of Torris Harris, appeals from the order of the district court granting Defendants' motion to enforce a settlement agreement. We AFFIRM.

I.

This action arises out of the suffocation death of Torris Harris, Tonya Harris's son, after an altercation with five Chattanooga police officers, Justin McCommon, Martin Penny, Chris Smith, David Allen, Mark Smeltzer, and two private citizens, Charles Kinsey, and Christopher Gaynor. On December 26, 2001, Defendants initiated a traffic stop of Torris Harris. Harris exited the vehicle, and the officers chased him. After they caught him, all Defendants restrained him. Torris died following the struggle.

On December 26, 2002, Plaintiff filed a complaint against the City of Chattanooga, five City of Chattanooga police officers, and two private citizens, alleging violations of 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983, 1985. On November 14, 2003, Harris's former counsel, Robin Ruben Flores, made a written demand to the City of Chattanooga to settle the case for \$100,000. On December 18, 2003, Flores sent by facsimile a letter to Phil Noblett. The letter is entitled "Acceptance of Offer to Settle" and states as follows:

Thank you for your attention to this case. As we discussed yesterday, December 17, via telephone, my client has accepted your offer on behalf of your client, the City of Chattanooga, to settle this matter for a sum

of twenty-eight thousand five hundred dollars (\$28,500.00). I assume that your client will also pay all court costs. I further assume that this amount shall constitute a settlement of all claims associated with this matter, state and federal, present and future.

This letter was copied to Ms. Tonya Harris, Lee Davis, Esq., Johnny Houston, Esq., W. Jeffrey Hollingsworth, Esq., John T. Rice, Esq.

On December 18, 2004, Noblett sent the following letter to Flores:

Pursuant to our telephone conversation yesterday afternoon, this letter will confirm that your client has agreed to settle her claims against the City of Chattanooga and all other parties regarding the death of Torris Harris in the amount of \$28,500.00. It is my understanding that this settlement will resolve all outstanding claims that your client has filed in federal court and in state court concerning this matter. Attached with this letter you will find, pursuant to our discussion, an Order of Dismissal for both lawsuits which will be filed in federal court and in Circuit Court and a Release of All Claims which I have prepared reflecting this settlement.

A copy of this letter was sent to attorneys Lee Davis, Johnny D. Houston, Jeffrey Hollingsworth, and John T. Rice. As noted in the letter, enclosed were a proposed "AGREED ORDER OF DISMISSAL" for the state action and a proposed "AGREED ORDER OF DISMISSAL" for the federal action. These proposed orders would dismiss both causes of action with prejudice as to all defendants. Also enclosed was a proposed "RELEASE OF ALL CLAIMS" releasing and

forever discharging all claims against the defendants in consideration of the sum of \$28,500.00.

Attorney Flores stipulated to the correctness of both letters. (JA. 204). In a letter dated December 22, 2003, postponing a hearing on a motion to compel filed by defendant Kinsey, Flores remarked to Attorney John Rice that "as you are probably now aware, my client has accepted an offer to settle the cases in state and federal courts as to all defendants."

On January 1, 2004, Flores sent the following letter to Noblett:

My client has reversed her position on her acceptance of your client's offer to settle this matter for \$ 28,500.00. She now rejects the offer and does not wish to sign the documents you forwarded to my office on December 18, 2003.

Instead, she makes a counter offer to settle for seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00), plus the funeral costs and expense and medical bills we have submitted to you.

I am aware that you are free to file a motion to enforce the settlement Ms. Harris has accepted. However, she now claims that she believed that she was accepting an offer of one hundred thousand dollars.

On January 13, 2004, subsequent to the settlement rejection, Plaintiff filed documents entitled "Motion for Enlargement of Time to Disclose Expert Witnesses," and a "Motion for Enlargement of Time." In the first motion, Plaintiff stated that she "would show that the parties reached

a settlement agreement on or about December 17, 2003, and that Plaintiff's counsel, in anticipation of the settlement, halted all work not associated with finalizing the settlement. Plaintiff would further show that she rejected the settlement in early January."

After receiving notice of rejection of the settlement agreement, Defendants filed motions to enforce the contract of settlement. The matter was referred by the district court to the magistrate judge pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B)&(C) for a report and recommendation. The magistrate judge conducted an evidentiary hearing on February 3, 2004. The magistrate judge found that

[t]he evidence adduced in this case unequivocally indicates that the plaintiff hired Attorney Flores as her agent in pursuing her claim against defendants and later in negotiating a settlement of her claims. Flores entered into an agreement with the defendants in which the material but simple terms of the agreement were set: all plaintiff's claims against all defendants arising from her son's death on December 26, 2001, were released and waived for the sum of \$28,500.00. There is no evidence to the contrary on that score even though the plaintiff herself testified she thought the \$28,500.00 was simply a first installment of a settlement for \$100,000. This mistaken understanding of the settlement amount apparently came from her own attorney's settlement demand, which was rejected, of \$100,000.00.

In footnote two, the magistrate judge specifically indicated that any objections had to be served and filed within ten days or the right to appeal the district court's order was waived.

None of the parties filed objections. On March 3, 2005, the district court accepted and adopted the magistrate's report, granted Defendants' motion, and entered judgment. Plaintiff filed a letter dated March 23, 2004, more than ten days after the order entered by the magistrate judge, which was treated as a motion for reconsideration. This letter states that on March 12, 2004, Plaintiff terminated Attorney Flores's employment. Plaintiff's motion also requested that the district court to set aside its order adopting the magistrate's report and recommendation. Plaintiff filed a pro se notice of appeal on April 2, 2004.

Flores was allowed to withdraw on April 8, 2004, by order of the magistrate judge. On May 14, 2004, the district court issued an order denying Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration. Because the order was not filed within ten days of the entry of the court's order of summary judgment, the court treated the motion as a Rule 60(b) motion for relief from judgment instead of a Rule 59(e) motion to alter or amend the judgment. The district court held that there were no circumstances justifying relief from judgment under Rule 60(b). The district court stated in relevant part:

Plaintiff's circumstances, while undoubtedly frustrating and emotional, do not amount to the unusual or extreme situation (sic) contemplated by Rule 60(b)(6). Plaintiff's contentions and representations regarding Attorney Flores' actions and her own state of mind do not call into question either the R&R or the Court's previous Order enforcing the settlement agreement. The Court entered the Order enforcing the settlement agreement upon concurring with Magistrate Judge Carter's conclusion attorney Flores had apparent authority to settle Plaintiff's case on her behalf. Whether or not attorney Flores had

actual authority to do so has no impact on liability as between Plaintiff and the various Defendants. At this point, Plaintiff's only recourse lies in a separate action against attorney Flores.

The district court therefore denied Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration. Plaintiff is currently represented by counsel on appeal.

II.

A.

On appeal, Plaintiff contends that the district court erred in failing to apply Tennessee law to the issue of enforcement of the proposed Settlement Agreement. However, because Plaintiff failed to object timely to the magistrate judge's report and recommendation, despite notice from the magistrate, she waived the right to appeal from the district court's order affirming the magistrate judge's report. *United States v. Campbell*, 261 F.3d 628, 632 (6th Cir. 2001); *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947, 949-50 (6th Cir. 1981); *see also Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 144, 155, 88 L. Ed. 2d 435, 106 S. Ct. 466 (1985)(affirming constitutionality of Sixth Circuit rule).¹

¹ Relying on *Patterson v. Mintzes*, 717 F.2d 284 (6th Cir. 1983), Plaintiff contends that the waiver of her appeal was abrogated by the district court's review of her late filing. In *Patterson*, this Court concluded that "when written objections to a magistrate's report are tendered beyond the 10-day period of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), but are nevertheless filed and considered by the district court, the criteria identified in *Walters* in justification of the waiver rule promulgated therein dissipate and the rule will not apply to bar appellate review." *Id.* at 286. *Patterson* is distinguishable. There, the district court considered the untimely objections *on the merits*. *Id.* By contrast, in this case, the district court considered this

In short, Plaintiff's failure to timely object to any matters addressed in the magistrate judges report and recommendation constitutes a waiver of these issues on appeal. More to the point, she has waived the three issues presented on appeal: (1) whether the district court erred in [sic]^{*} applying Tennessee law regarding enforcement of the proposed settlement agreement; (2) whether the district court erred in finding Plaintiff's former counsel had "apparent authority to settle lawsuits," and (3) whether the district court erred in finding the proposed settlement agreement had been met on all material terms.

Plaintiff's appeal is also defective because she failed to raise the issue of the proper law to be applied until this appeal. It is well-settled that this Court will not consider arguments raised for the first time on appeal. See *Foster v.*

matter under Rule 60(b) only, not on the merits.

Because the *Walters* rule is not jurisdictional, it may be excused in two situations. First, issues not raised in an objection may be considered on appeal if the district court addressed them. *Id.*; *Roach v. Chater*, No. 96-5780, 1997 WL 330649, at *2 (6th Cir. June 16, 1997)(order). As noted, the district court did not in this case address the merits. In addition, we may choose not to adhere to the *Walters* rule if exceptional circumstances indicate that it would be in the "interests of justice" to consider the merits. *Kent v. Johnson*, 821 F.2d 1220, 1222-23 (6th Cir. 1987). In this situation, the Supreme Court has suggested that this exception might be applicable where the district court has committed "plain error." *Thomas*, 474 U.S. at 155 & n.15. The record does not support application of the exception here, however.

^{*} The opinion contains a typographical error inasmuch as the question presented was actually, "whether the district court erred in failing to apply Tennessee law."

Barilow, 6 F.3d 405, 407 (6th Cir. 1993)(issues presented for the first time on appeal are waived). Even if we consider the merits of Plaintiff's claims, she cannot prevail.

B.

Plaintiff contends that the magistrate judge erred in applying Michigan law instead of Tennessee law in determining whether the settlement agreement was enforceable. In support, she points out that the agreement was entered into in Tennessee. *See Capital Dredge & Dock Corp. v. City of Detroit*, 800 F.2d 525, (6th Cir. 1986); *Zink v. GE Capital Assur. Co.*, 73 Fed. Appx. 858, 861 (6th Cir. 2003)(holding that "the settlement agreement was entered into in Kentucky . . . as a result, Kentucky law governs whether the settlement agreement was enforceable").

As Plaintiff notes, the magistrate judge did not rely upon Tennessee law, but cited two Sixth Circuit opinions, *Capital Dredge & Dock Corp. v. City of Detroit*, 800 F.2d at 530 and *Noga v. Parts Assocs.*, 2000 U.S. App. LEXIS 1937, 2000 WL 178385 (6th Cir. Feb. 8, 2000), which applied Michigan law. She claims that this is problematic because Michigan law holds that when a client hires an attorney and holds him out as counsel representing him in a matter, "the client clothes the attorney with apparent authority to settle claims connected with the matter." *Capital Dredge*, 800 F.2d at 530. By contrast, Tennessee law holds that attorneys do not have apparent authority to settle matters, but rather the client must give express authority to settle a case.

Indeed, in Tennessee law "the general rule . . . is that an attorney cannot surrender substantial rights of a client, including agreeing to dismissal of litigation which permanently bars a client from pursuing his claim, without the

express authority of the client." *Absar v. Jones*, 833 S.W.2d 86, 89-90 (Tenn Ct. App. Jan. 27, 1992)(citations omitted); see also *Austin Powder Co. v. Thompson*, 1995 Tenn. App. LEXIS 42, No. 03A01-9408-CH-00294, 1995 WL 33778 (Tenn. Ct. App. Jan. 27, 1995)(stating that "we adhere to the universal rule that a client's employment of an attorney does not clothe the attorney with authority to compromise and settle [the] client's cause of action, and such authority may not be implied"(internal quotations marks and citation omitted)); *Fort Sanders Reg'l Med. Ctr. v. Collins*, 1992 Tenn. App. LEXIS 667, No. 03A01-9202-00041, 1992WL 184682 (Tenn. Ct. App. Aug. 5, 1992)(same). However, in this case, a review of her testimony before the magistrate judge reflects that Plaintiff accepted the offer of \$28,500 and later reversed her acceptance.

Attorney Flores questioned Plaintiff about the settlement as follows:²

² Just prior to this testimony, Plaintiff testified to the following:

Q: Okay. Tonya, what was your understanding -- What did you understand, from me, the terms of the settlement offer from Mr. Noblett, who is the counsel over here . . . what did you understand the offer was from him that I communicated to you back on December the 16th -- the 17th?

A: 28,500.

Q: 28,500?

A: Yes. But I thought that was coming out of the hundred thousand.

Q: Out of what hundred thousand?

Q: How many times have we met as far as discussing the terms of an offer that we made and an acceptance of the offer; do you recall how many times?

A: Maybe about -- probably about 3 times, maybe...?

Q: About three times?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, was that -- where was that? Where were those meetings?

A: Well, two was at the office. And then you called me over the phone and told me about the settlement.

Q: Okay, an acceptance of an offer, do you recall what we discussed about that?

A: The only thing that I remember was to accept the \$28,000 because I was losing my house.

A: I thought I had a settlement of a hundred thousand.

Q: What made you think that you had a settlement for a hundred thousand dollars?

A: When we got the letter.

Q: What letter was that?

A: That was the letter that had the hundred thousand on it. And I thought since I was losing my house, that they would just go ahead and take part of that and take it out of the hundred thousand.

Q: Did you feel pressured to accept the \$28,000? A: Yes, I did. Yes.

Q: You thought that -- All right. Let's go back to the house issue, to the house issue, Tonya. Why were you getting ready to lose your house? Let me back up a bit, do we agree that your house was in foreclosure?

A: Yeah.

On cross-examination by Joun Rice, Plaintiff acknowledged that she has a college education. She further admitted that she received a copy of the December 18, 2003 letter, which clearly stated at the top in bold type "Acceptance of Offer to Settle." Plaintiff also stated that she did not call to tell her attorney that the letter was not correct. Plaintiff admitted that she also received the December 22 letter addressed to John Rice confirming the settlement. Finally, Plaintiff admitted to the following:

Q: And when you got these letters, you understood the terms of the settlement, did you not?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: And you later on decided to reject the settlement?

A: Yeah.

From Flores' January 1, 2004 letter, and Plaintiff's own testimony, it is clear from the record that Plaintiff initially gave Flores express authority to settle the matter, and then later reversed her position. By her acceptance of the offer she gave her attorney express authority to accept the offer on her

behalf. Under Tennessee law, where a principal gives an agent express authority to settle a case, either orally or in writing, the principal is bound by the acts of the agent within the scope of authority expressly conferred upon the agent. *S. Ry. v. Pickle*, 138 Tenn. 238, 197 S.W. 675 (Tenn. 1917). As the district court stated at the evidentiary hearing, "I think it's fair to say that if a party directs their lawyer to settle a case, and that is communicated, the fact that a person later on may change their mind about the settlement does not affect the fact that it is settled." In any event, by waiting two weeks before notifying her attorney of her intent to revoke her acceptance of the settlement agreement, Plaintiff ratified the settlement agreement through her silence. *See Austin Powder*, 1995 Tenn. App. LEXIS 42, 1995 WL 33778 at ¶3 (noting that silence can amount to ratification where the party with knowledge of the transaction fails for a reasonable time to protest or dissent). Thus, as the district court held, any dissatisfaction Plaintiff has regarding the settlement can only be directed towards her attorney.

C.

Plaintiff also asserts that the district court erred in finding that the proposed settlement agreement had been met on all material terms, because Plaintiff never understood the most important term, the amount of the settlement. However, as reflected above, Plaintiff testified that she understood the settlement agreement and later decided to reject it.

Plaintiff further alleges that she never understood that negotiations were taking place, and therefore there was never a meeting of the minds between herself and the defendants as to the settlement amount. Again, the foregoing testimony establishes that Plaintiff was aware of the fact that she was accepting an offer of \$28,500, and that she was doing so

because she was faced with the potential of losing her home. The record also clearly shows that Plaintiff received copies of all correspondence from her attorney relating to the acceptance of the written settlement offer made by the City of Chartanooga on December 17, 2003, and that she was capable of understanding them.

In sum, there was clearly a meeting of the minds as to the essential terms of the contract on December 18, 2003, such that a binding contract under Tennessee law was created. The district court did not err in enforcing it, and did not err in finding there was no adequate basis for relief under Rule 60(b).

III.

AFFIRMED.

APPENDIX C

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA**

Case No. 1:20-CV-385

[Filed March 3, 2004]

TONYA HARRIS,)
Plaintiffs,)
)
v.)
)
CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, et al.,)
Defendants.)

ORDER

United States Magistrate William B. Mitchell Carter filed his report and recommendation pursuant to 2.8 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and *Fed. R. Cir. P.* 72(b) (Court File No. 89). Neither party filed an objection within the given ten (10) days.

After reviewing the record, the Court agrees with the magistrate judge's report and recommendation. The Court **ACCEPTS** and **ADOPTS** the magistrate judge's findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommendations pursuant to

Section 636(b)(1) and Rule 72(b). Accordingly, the Court
ORDERS:

Defendants' Motions to Enforce a Settlement Agreement
is GRANTED (Court File Nos. 68, 72, 75, 80, and 83).
Accordingly, the Clerk of Court is hereby **ORDERED TO
CLOSE THIS CASE.**

SO ORDERED.

/s/

CURTIS L. COLLIER
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

APPENDIX D

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA**

Case No. 1:20-CV-385

[Filed February 11, 2004]

TONYA HARRIS,)
Plaintiffs,)
)
v.)
)
CITY OF CHATTANOOGA,)
JUSTIN MCCOMMON, MARTIN PENNY,)
CHRIS SMITH, DAVID ALLEN,)
MARK SMELTZER, CHARLES KINSEY,)
And CHRISTOPHER GAYNOR,)
Defendants.)

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

I. Introduction

Defendants City of Chattanooga, Martin Penny. Chris Smith, David Allen, and Charles Kinney have filed Motions to Enforce a Settlement Agreement which have been referred to the undersigned pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B)&(C)

for a Report and Recommendation by the District Court (Court File Nos. 68, 72, 75, and 80). The undersigned Magistrate Judge shall also address in this report and recommendation defendants Justin McCommon's, Mark Smeltzer's and Christopher Gaynor's motion to enforce settlement (Court File No. 83).¹ This action arises from an incident occurring on December 26, 2001, involving defendants Justin McCommon, Martin Penny, Chris Smith, David Allen, Mark Smeltzer, Charles Kinsey, Christopher Gaynor, and plaintiff Tonya Harris' now deceased son, Torris Harris. At the time in question, all of the individual defendants were police officers with the Chattanooga Police Department. The plaintiff alleges that her son, Torris Harris, was subjected to an unlawful arrest and that the defendants used excessive force in arresting him resulting in Torris Harris' death. The plaintiff, as administratrix of Torris Harris' estate, seeks damages for the alleged violations of Torris Harris' civil rights pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985. All defendants in this case seek to enforce a settlement agreement which defendants assert have been reached with the plaintiff.

¹ The District Court entered the Order of Referral on January 26, 2004. Subsequently, on January 28, 2004, defendants Justin McCommon, Mark Smeltzer, and Christopher Gaynor also filed a Motion to Enforce Settlement Agreement between the plaintiff and defendants (Court File No. 83). McCommon, Smeltzer, and Gaynor adopted and incorporated by reference into their motion the other defendants' motions to enforce contract of settlement. Even though the Order of Referral does not specifically refer this motion (Court File No 83) to the undersigned magistrate judge, because it concerns the same issue and requests the same relief as the other order referred by the District Court, the undersigned shall address this motion as well.

II. Relevant Facts

An evidentiary hearing was held on Monday, February 3, 2004, on defendants' motions to enforce the settlement agreement. The undersigned relies on the evidence adduced at this evidentiary hearing as well as the evidentiary materials accompanying the defendants' motions in preparing this recitation of facts.

While this particular claim has been pending in the United States District Court, plaintiff brought another cause of action in the Circuit Court of Hamilton County, Tennessee, against the same defendants arising from the same incident under Docket No. 02C-2227 (Affidavit of John Rice, ¶ 4, Court File No. 69). By letter dated December 18, 2003, the plaintiff's counsel, Atty. Robin Reuben Flores, sent by facsimile and by United States mail a letter to Phil Noblett, attorney for the City of Chattanooga (City), in this matter. The letter was entitled, "Acceptance of Offer to Settle" (See Exhibit I, Court File No. 69). The letter stated:

As we discussed yesterday, December 17, via telephone, my client has accepted your offer on behalf of your client, The City of Chattanooga, to settle this matter for a sum of twenty-eight thousand five hundred dollars (\$28,500.00). I assume that your client will also pay all court costs. I further assume that this amount will constitute a settlement of all claims associated with this matter, state and federal, present and future.

Id. The letter was copied to the plaintiff, Ms. Tonya Harris, and to Attys. Lee Davis, Johnny D. Houston, Jeffery Hollingsworth, and John T. Rice. Lee Davis represents Mark Smeltzer. Johnny D. Houston represents Christopher Smith.

Jeffery Hollingsworth represents David Allen. John T. Rice represents Charles R. Kinsey, and Phil Noblett represents the City of Chattanooga, Justin McCommon, Christopher Gaynor, and Martin Penny.

By letter dated December 18, 2003, City Attorney Phil Noblett wrote plaintiff's counsel, Robin Flores:

Pursuant to our telephone conversation yesterday afternoon, this letter will confirm that your client has agreed to settle her claims against The City of Chattanooga and all other parties regarding the death of Torris Harris in the amount of \$28,500.00. It is my understanding that this settlement will resolve all outstanding claims that your client has filed in federal court and in state court concerning this matter. Attached with this letter you will find, pursuant to our discussion, an Order of Dismissal for both lawsuits which will be filed in federal court and in Circuit Court and a Release of All Claims which I have prepared reflecting this settlement.

(Exhibit 2, Court File No. 69). A copy of this letter was sent to Attys. Lee Davis, Johnny D. Houston, Jeffery Hollingsworth, and John T. Rice. A proposed "AGREED ORDER OF DISMISSAL" for the state action and a proposed "AGREED ORDER" of dismissal for the federal action were enclosed in the letter. These proposed orders would dismiss with prejudice the entire causes of action in both state and federal courts as to all defendants (See Exhibits 3 and 4, Court File No. 69). Also enclosed with Mr. Noblett's letter was a proposed "RELEASE OF ALL CLAIMS" releasing and forever discharging all claims against the defendants in consideration of the sum of \$28,500.00 (Exhibit 5, Court File No. 69). In his affidavit, Atty. Jeffery Hollingsworth, who

represents defendant David Allen, stated that Mr. Noblett sent him a letter on December 18, 2003, confirming the terms of the settlement agreement and confirming that all other parties were to be included in the proposed Release (Court File No. 77, ¶6).

By letter dated December 2, 2003, plaintiff's attorney, Robin Flores, wrote counsel for Charles Kinsey, John Rice, the following:

As you probably are now aware, my client has accepted an offer to settle the cases in state and federal courts as to all defendants. I have notified my intended experts about this development. Thus, I believe the discovery issue is now moot. I assume that you will strike your motion to compel discovery responses. If I am wrong, please let me know.

The letter was copied to Tonya Harris (Exhibit 6, Court File No. 69).

By letter dated January 1, 2004, Arty. Flores wrote the City's counsel, Phil Noblett, to inform him that she (plaintiff) had rejected the \$28,500.00 settlement offer:

My client has reversed her position on her acceptance of your client's offer to "settle this matter for \$28,500.00. She now rejects the offer and does not wish to sign the documents you forwarded to my office on December 18, 2003.

Instead, she makes a counter-offer to settle for Seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00), plus the funeral costs and expense [sic] and medical bills we have submitted to you.

I am aware that you are now free to file a motion to enforce the settlement Ms. Harris has accepted. However, she now claims that she believed that she was accepting an offer of \$100,000.00.

(Exhibit 7, Court File No. 69).

In his affidavit, Atty. Phil Noblett stated that he never made any settlement offer to Atty. Flores for \$100,000.00 (Court File No. 74, ¶2). During the evidentiary hearing, plaintiff testified that she thought the \$28,500.00 settlement was simply the first installment of a \$100,000 settlement agreement. No evidence was produced, however, to the effect that any defendant, through counsel or otherwise, ever made a settlement offer of \$100,000 though plaintiffs counsel did state that he had originally made a demand of the defendants for \$100,000 to settle the case. The plaintiff also testified at the evidentiary hearing that she talked with her attorney three or four times before finally agreeing to the settlement agreement with the defendants.

Finally, on January 15, 2004, the plaintiff filed a motion for "enlargement of time for expert witness disclosures under F.R.C.P. 26 (Court File No. 70). In this motion, the plaintiff stated that she was requesting additional time to disclose her expert testimony and "[f]or cause, Plaintiff would show that the parties reached a settlement agreement on or about December 17, 2003, and that Plaintiff's counsel, in anticipation of the settlement, halted all work not associated with finalizing the settlement. Plaintiff would further show that she rejected the settlement in early January."

III. Discussion

A federal court has the inherent authority to enforce settlement agreements made in a case pending before it. *Re/Max International, Inc. v. Realty One, Inc.*, 271 F.3d 633, 654-46 (6th Cir.), *cert denied*, 535 U.S. 987 (2002); *Brock v. Scheuner Corp.*, 841 F.2d 151, 154 (6th Cir. 1988). Before enforcing a settlement, however, an agreement must have been met on all material terms. If an agreement has been met on all material terms, then the parties are bound by the agreement. *Re/Max International, Inc.*, 271 F.3d at 645-46; *Brock*, 841 F.2d at 154. Finally, "when a client hires an attorney and holds him out as counsel representing him in this matter, the client clothes the attorney with apparent authority to settle claims connected with the matter." *Capitol Dredge and Dock Corp. v. City of Detroit*, 800 F.2d 525, 531 (6th Cir. 1986); *see also Noga v. Parts Associates, Inc.*, 2000 WL 178385 (6th Cir. Feb. 8, 2000) (same).

The evidence adduced in this case unequivocally indicates that the plaintiff hired Attorney Flores to act as her agent in pursuing her claim against defendants and later in negotiating a settlement of her Claims. Flores entered into an agreement with the defendants in which the material but simple terms of fine agreement were set: all plaintiff's claims against all defendants arising from her son's death on December 26, 2001, were released and waived for the sum of \$28,500.00. There is no evidence to the contrary on that score even though the plaintiff herself testified she thought the \$28,500.00 was simply a first installment of a settlement for \$100,000. This mistaken understanding of the settlement amount apparently came from her own attorney's settlement demand, which was rejected, of \$100,000.00.

IV. Conclusion

In summation, the plaintiff clothed her attorney with apparent authority to enter into a settlement on her behalf of all her claims against defendants in exchange for \$28,500.00. Defendants are entitled to enforcement of this settlement. Accordingly, it is **RECOMMENDED** that defendants' motions to enforce the settlement agreement be **GRANTED**.²

/s/

William B. Mitchell Carter
United States Magistrate Judge

² Any objections to this Report and Recommendation must be served and filed within ten (10) days after service of a copy of this recommended disposition on the objecting party. Such objections must conform to the requirements of Rule 72(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Failure to file objections within the time specified waives the right to appeal the District Court's order. *Thomas v. ALN*, 474 U.S. 140, 88 L.Ed.2d 435, 106 S. Ct. 466 (1985). The district court need not provide *de novo* review where objections to this report and recommendation are frivolous, conclusive or general. *Mira v. Marshall*, 1106 F.2d 636 (6th Cir. 1986). Only specific objections are reserved for appellate review. *Smith v. Detroit Federation of Teachers*, 829 F.2d 1370 (6th Cir. 1987).

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Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
FEB 8 - 2006
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No. 05-863

**In the
Supreme Court of the United States**

TONYA HARRIS,
AS ADMINISTRATRIX OF THE
ESTATE OF DECEDENT TORRIS HARRIS,
Petitioner,

v.

THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE, ET AL.;
Respondent.

**On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the United
States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit**

RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

1. Whether the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals improperly exercised its supervisory power in a way that conflicted with Petitioner's right of due process by denying Petitioner's statutory right to appeal and/or arbitrarily applying its waiver rule and exceptions?
 - A. Whether the Waiver Rule at issue was improperly applied?
 - B. Whether Certiorari is warranted because the District Court committed "plain error?"
 - C. Whether the actions of the Sixth Circuit, in reviewing this case, denied the Petitioner due process of law?
 - D. Whether the Sixth Circuit acted contrary to the precedent of this Court in weighing the evidence presented at hearings and making factual findings consistent with the evidence in the record?
 - E. Whether any split among the Circuits in applying exceptions to waiver rules, was previously recognized in *Thomas v. Arn*?
 - F. Whether there was any arbitrary application of Sixth Circuit waiver exceptions in this case which would warrant any grant of certiorari?

**LIST OF ALL PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDING
& CORPORATE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

The caption of the case contains the names of all the parties involved in this matter.

The City of Chattanooga is a municipal corporation and has no parent companies or non-wholly owned subsidiaries required to be disclosed under Supreme Court Rule 29.6.

Defendants Martin Penney and Christopher Gaynor are individuals who were employed at various times by the City of Chattanooga in their capacity as police officers. At the time of this incident, defendant Gaynor was a ride-along and was not employed by the City of Chattanooga.

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OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit was not recommended for full-text publication. The full opinion of the Sixth Circuit is attached as Appendix B to the Petition for Writ of Certiorari.

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

Respondent, City of Chattanooga, adopts and incorporates the Statements of Jurisdiction set forth in the Petition for Writ of Certiorari filed by Petitioner, TONYA HARRIS, as Administratrix of the Estate of Decedent Torris Harris.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS, TREATIES, STATUTES, ORDINANCES AND REGULATIONS INVOLVED

Respondent City of Chattanooga adopts and incorporates the Constitutional provisions, treaties, statutes, ordinances and regulations involved set forth in the Petition for Writ of Certiorari filed by Petitioner, TONYA HARRIS, as Administratrix of the Estate of Decedent Torris Harris.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On December 26, 2002, plaintiff filed a Complaint against the City of Chattanooga, five City of Chattanooga police officers, and two private citizens pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. On November 14, 2003, Appellant's former counsel, Attorney Robin Ruben Flores, made a demand to the City of Chattanooga to settle the case for \$100,000.00.

On December 17, 2003, Attorney Phillip A. Noblett, attorney for the City of Chattanooga and Martin Penny, and Attorney Flores engaged in settlement negotiations and reached the settlement agreement to release all claims for \$28,500.00. On December 18, 2003, Flores sent by facsimile a letter to Phil Noblett. The letter is entitled "Acceptance of Offer to Settle" and states as follows:

Thank you for your attention to this case. As we discussed yesterday, December 17, via telephone, **my client has accepted your offer on behalf of your client, the City of Chattanooga, to settle this matter for a sum of twenty-eight thousand five hundred dollars (\$28,500.00).** I assume that your client will also pay all court costs. I further assume that this amount shall constitute a settlement of all claims associated with this matter, state and federal, present and future. (Emphasis supplied).

This letter was copied to Ms. Tonya Harris, and to other attorneys of record: Lee Davis, Esq., Johnny Houston, Esq., W. Jeffrey Hollingsworth, Esq., John T. Rice, Esq.

On December 18, 2003, Noblett sent the following letter to Flores:

Pursuant to our telephone conversation yesterday afternoon, this letter will confirm that your client has agreed to settle her claims against the City of Chattanooga and all other parties regarding the death of Torris Harris in the amount of \$28,500.00. It is my understanding that this settlement will resolve all outstanding claims that your client has filed in federal court and in state court concerning this matter. Attached with this letter you will find, pursuant to our discussion, an Order of Dismissal for both lawsuits which will be filed in federal court and in Circuit Court and a Release of All Claims which I have prepared reflecting this settlement.

Thereafter, the Petitioner sought to revoke her acceptance of the settlement offer. On or about January 1, 2004, Petitioner's counsel sent a letter which stated: "My client has reversed her position on her acceptance of your client's offer to settle this matter for \$28,500. She now rejects the offer and does not wish to sign the documents you forwarded to my office on December 18, 2003. . . . I am aware that you are free to file a Motion to Enforce the Settlement Ms. Harris has accepted."

The Respondent and other defendants to the action then filed various motions to enforce the settlement. The District Judge referred the motions for an Order to Enforce the Contract of Settlement to the Magistrate Judge on January 26, 2004. The hearing regarding the motions to enforce settlement agreement was held on February 3, 2004 before the Magistrate Judge. On February 11, 2004, the Magistrate Judge entered his Report and Recommendation in which he recommended that the defendants' motions to enforce settlement agreement be granted. On March 3, 2004, the

District Judge adopted the Report and Recommendation of the Magistrate Judge and terminated the case.

Appellant filed a letter dated March 23, 2004, more than ten (10) days after the Order entered by the District Court Judge which also was treated as a *pro se* Motion for Reconsideration. This letter states that on March 12, 2004, Appellant terminated the employment of Attorney Flores. Attorney Flores was eventually allowed to withdraw on April 8, 2004 by Order of the Magistrate Judge. The Plaintiff/Appellant's Motion for Reconsideration also requested that the District Court Judge set aside his March 3, 2004 Order adopting the Magistrate's Report and Recommendation. On April 2, 2004, Plaintiff/Appellant Tonya Harris filed her Notice of Appeal to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. On the same day, the Plaintiff/Appellant filed her Application to Proceed in Forma Pauperis.

On May 14, 2004, the District Court Judge entered an Order granting Attorney Flores' Motion to Declare Attorney Lien, denying the Defendants' Motion for Reconsideration, rejecting the Defendants' objections to the Magistrate's Order of April 8, 2004, granting the defendants leave to deposit funds in the Court, and granting the plaintiff application to proceed *in forma pauperis*. The District Court Judge also entered a Memorandum detailing his reasoning behind such decisions. This Memorandum and Opinion of the District Judge was not attached to the Petition. A copy of the Memorandum and Opinion and Order of the District Court Judge is attached to this Brief in Opposition as Appendix 1 and 2.

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling of the District Court on June 15, 2005, and clearly found that the plaintiff's failure to timely object to any matters in the

Magistrate Judge's Report and Recommendation constituted a waiver of these issues on appeal. On September 29, 2005, the Sixth Circuit entered an Order concluding that no rehearing *en banc* should issue and denying a petition for rehearing *en banc*.

REASONS WHY THE PETITION SHOULD BE DENIED

None of the criteria set forth in Supreme Court Rule 10 that could establish a "compelling reason" to grant the petition is present here. Petitioner has failed to identify any way in which the Sixth Circuit's decision either:

1. conflicts with the decision of another United States Court of Appeals,
2. decides an important federal question in a way that conflicts with the decision by a state court of last resort,
3. so far departs from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings to justify an exercise of this Court's supervisory power,
4. decides an important question of federal law previously undecided by the Court, or,
5. conflicts with relevant decisions of this Court.

Supreme Court Rule 10 specifically provides that a petition for writ of certiorari "is rarely granted when the asserted error consists of erroneous factual findings or the misapplication of a properly stated rule of law." The petition for writ of certiorari to this Court in this case is nothing more

than a claim by Petitioner that the Sixth Circuit failed to follow its own procedural rule on waiver of appeal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) adopted in *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947, 949-950 (6th Cir. 1981) and affirmed by the decision of this Court in *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).

This case involves an alleged failure of the District Judge and the Court of Appeals to consider an untimely objection to the report and recommendation of a magistrate that enforced a settlement agreement between the parties. This case is not suitable for review because the Sixth Circuit did not misapply any rule of law which is otherwise appropriate for review based on Supreme Court Rule 10.

This Petition for Certiorari is premised upon an alleged arbitrary application by the Sixth Circuit of this Court's opinion in *Thomas v. Arn*. Pursuant to the doctrine of *Thomas v. Arn*, a Court of Appeals may adopt a rule conditioning an appeal when taken from a district court judgment that adopts a magistrate's recommendation. The rule adopted by the Sixth Circuit requires a timely filing of objections to the magistrate's recommendation with the district court. The Sixth Circuit did not under the facts of this case waive the timely filing of objections to the magistrate's recommendation and consider other legal arguments raised for the first time on appeal.

Petitioner also claims that the Sixth Circuit should have waived the application of this rule "in the interest of justice" – a matter involving the exercise of judicial discretion.

1. **THE SIXTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS DID NOT EXERCISE ITS SUPERVISORY POWER IN A WAY THAT CONFLICTED WITH PETITIONER'S RIGHT OF DUE PROCESS BY DENYING PETITIONER'S STATUTORY RIGHT TO APPEAL AND/OR ARBITRARILY APPLYING ITS WAIVER RULE AND EXCEPTIONS.**

A. The Waiver Rule at issue:

At issue here is a rule, adopted by the Sixth Circuit in *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981), and approved by this Court in *Thomas v. Arn*, which conditioned appeal upon a party filing objections to a magistrate's report within ten (10) days as provided for in 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).

In *United States v. Walters*, the Sixth Circuit approved the waiver of a right to appeal and clearly held as follows:

The permissive language of 28 U.S.C. § 636 [28 USCS § 636] suggests that a party's failure to file objections is not a waiver of appellate review. However, the fundamental congressional policy underlying the Magistrate's Act – to improve access to the federal courts and aid the efficient administration of justice – is best served by our holding that a party shall file objections with the district court or else waive right to appeal. Additionally, through the exercise of our supervisory power, we hold that a party shall be informed by the magistrate that objections must be filed within ten days or further appeal is waived.

638 F.2d at 949-950 (footnote and citations omitted). This express ruling by the Sixth Circuit was later affirmed in *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. at 145.

The hearing on various motions to enforce the settlement agreement was held before the Magistrate Judge on February 3, 2004. At the hearing, Tonya Harris was represented by Attorney Robin Flores. Tonya Harris provided testimony concerning her understanding of the terms of the settlement agreement and Attorney Flores stipulated that the only settlement offer from the City of Chattanooga was \$28,500.00 which was communicated to his client. The Report and Recommendation of the Magistrate Judge was filed in the United States District Court on February 11, 2004. Footnote 2 of the Magistrate Judge's Report and Recommendation states:

Any objection to this Report and Recommendation must be served and filed within ten (10) days after service of a copy of this recommended disposition on the objecting party. Such objections must conform to the requirements of Rule 72(b) of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure*. Failure to file objections within the time specified waives the right to appeal the District Court's Order. *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 88 L.Ed.2d 435, 106 S. Ct. 466 (1985). The District Court need not provide *de novo* review where objections to this Report and Recommendation are frivolous, collusive or general. *Mira v. Marshall*, 806 F.2d 636 (6th Cir. 1986). Only specific objections are reserved for appellate review. *Smith v. Detroit Federation of Teachers*, 829 F.2d 1370 (6th Cir. 1987).

No objection to the Report and Recommendation was timely filed and on March 3, 2004, United States District

Judge entered an Order accepting and adopting the Magistrate Judge's findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommendations pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and Rule 72(b) of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure*.

From the beginning of this suit through Attorney Flores' withdrawal of the case on April 8, 2004, Tonya Harris was represented by Attorney Robin Flores. In a subsequent letter dated March 23, 2004, from Tonya Harris to Judge Curtis Collier, Appellant states that she terminated Attorney Flores as her attorney on Friday, March 12, 2004. In that letter, Ms. Harris requested that Judge Collier set aside the Order that was entered on March 3, 2004 because "this alleged settlement agreement was procured with fraud and deception by my former attorney Robin Flores." Upon motion, Attorney Flores was eventually allowed to withdraw from representation on April 8, 2004.

This Court, in the case of *Thomas v. Arn*, clearly held that the party shall be informed by the Magistrate that objections must be filed within ten (10) days or further appeal is waived. *Id.* at p. 470. There is no dispute in this case that the Magistrate Judge's Order filed on February 11, 2004 provided clear notice to the litigants and an opportunity to file objections timely as to the Report and Recommendation. None of the actions taken by the Magistrate or District Judge in this case violate either the Federal Magistrate's Act of the Constitution or this Court's ruling in *Thomas v. Arn*.

The Petitioner, in her late filed March 23 letter, did request that the District Judge set aside his Order Affirming the Report and Recommendation of the Magistrate Judge which was reviewed and appropriately considered by the District Judge in the Order and Memorandum entered on May 14, 2004. (Appendix 1). The letter was filed well past the ten

(10) day time limit for objections to be filed. The Petitioner's March 23rd letter was not treated as an objection but appropriately treated by the District Judge and the Sixth Circuit as a Motion to Reconsider under Rule 60 of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure*. Both of the underlying courts properly found no legal basis for the original dismissal to be changed under Rule 60 following the settlement which was accepted in this case. Thus, this petition should be denied because of the failure to timely object and due to waiver of issues presented for appeal.

B. Certiorari is not warranted because the District Court has not committed "plain error."

The Petitioner asserts that this Court in *Thomas v. Arn* expressly reserved the issue of how Appellate Courts must apply exceptions to their waiver rules. Justice Marshall, in *Thomas v. Arn*, clearly found that a Court of Appeals may adopt a rule conditioning appeal, when taken from a District Court Judgment that adopts a Magistrate's recommendation, upon the filing of objections with the District Court identifying those issues on which further review is desired. Such a rule, at least when it incorporates clear notice to the litigants and an opportunity to seek an extension of time for filing objections, is a valid exercise of the supervisory power that does not violate either the Federal Magistrate's Act or the Constitution. 474 U.S. at 155.

This Court, in *Thomas v. Arn*, found the Sixth Circuit rule to be reasonable and found that litigants subject to the Sixth Circuit's rules are afforded "an opportunity. . . granted at a meaningful time and in a meaningful manner,". Quoting *Armstrong v. Manzo*, 380 U.S. 545, 552 (1965). None of the interests in this civil case require application of Rule 52(b) of the *Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure* to state that a Court

may correct plain error despite the failure of the party to object. To the extent that Petitioner attempts to apply the *Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure* in this case, such rules are not applicable and this case is not appropriate for certiorari to compel the Sixth Circuit to apply other exceptions to its waiver rules. In reviewing this case, the Sixth Circuit clearly considered its previous authority in *United States v. Campbell*, 261 F.3d 628, 632 (6th Cir. 2001); and *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947, 949-50 (6th Cir. 1981), in addition to the *Thomas v. Arn* case. None of those decisions or the approach of the Sixth Circuit in reviewing this case establish that there is plain error in the Magistrate Judge's opinion or in the District Court's interpretation of underlying Tennessee law.

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals clearly reviewed allegations by Petitioner that the Magistrate Judge did not rely upon Tennessee law concerning whether the settlement agreement was enforceable in this case. After reviewing the letters and the plaintiff's own testimony, the Sixth Circuit found "it is clear from the record that plaintiff initially gave Flores express authority to settle the matter, and then later reversed her position." "By her acceptance of the offer, she gave her attorney express authority to accept the offer on her behalf." (Appendix to Petition, 14a). Under Tennessee law, where a principal gives an agent express authority to settle a case, either orally or in writing, the principal is bound by the acts of the agent within the scope of the authority expressly conferred upon the agent. *S. Ry. v. Pickle*, 138 Tenn. 238, 197 S.W. 675 (Tenn. 1917). The Sixth Circuit found in any event, by waiting two weeks before notifying her attorney of her intent to revoke her acceptance of the settlement agreement, plaintiff ratified the settlement agreement through her silence. (Appendix to Petition, 15a). As such, the Courts below have not found "plain error" in the application of

Tennessee law and the acceptance of a settlement offer in this case. As such, there is no plain error in this record and certiorari is not warranted on the grounds set forth at arguments IB and II of the Petition.

C. The actions of the Sixth Circuit, in reviewing this case, did not deny the Petitioner due process of law.

After a full review of the record, including the letters and the transcript in this case, the Sixth Circuit found that there was “clearly a meeting of the minds as to the essential terms of the contract on December 18, 2003, such that a binding contract under Tennessee law was created.” The District Court did not err in enforcing it, and did not err in finding there was no adequate basis for relief under Rule 60(b).” As such, the Sixth Circuit reviewed the facts on the record and found that there was acceptance of a written settlement offer by the plaintiff.

Such factual findings are disregarded by the Petitioner in her extensive arguments over waiver exceptions available within the Sixth Circuit and whether such waiver rule and exceptions were properly applied by the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. The lengthy waiver argument by Petitioner maintains that its application in this case denied this Petitioner due process of law. As a factual matter in this case, the District Court, the Sixth Circuit and the Magistrate Judge, have now all found as a matter of fact that the plaintiff testified that she understood the settlement agreement but later decided to reject it. The Magistrate Judge made a clear finding that the Petitioner “testified at the evidentiary hearing that she talked with her attorney three or four times before finally agreeing to the settlement agreement with the defendants.” (Appendix to Petition, 24a). These factual disputes over the meetings of the mind of the parties in this

settlement agreement are not appropriate grounds for the grant of a certiorari pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 10(a).

D. The Sixth Circuit did not act contrary to the precedent of this Court in weighing the evidence presented at hearings and making factual findings consistent with the evidence in the record.

The actions taken by the Sixth Circuit in this case did not decide factual issues *de novo*. The Court of Appeals did find that “a review of her testimony before the Magistrate reflects that the plaintiff accepted the offer of \$28,500.00 and later reversed her acceptance.” By reviewing the information in the record, the Sixth Circuit held that it is clear from the record that plaintiff initially gave express authority to settle the matter and then later reversed her position. Those factual findings were clearly reviewed by the Sixth Circuit and the District Court below. The application of the Sixth Circuit in this case properly reviewed the District Court’s factual findings under the clearly erroneous standard and reviewed legal conclusions under a *de novo* review. *Performance Unlimited, Inc. v. Questar Publishers, Inc.*, 52 F.3d 1373, 1381 (6th Cir. 1995).

Such action by the Sixth Circuit in this case did not overstep the bounds of its duty under Rule 52(a) of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure* but merely reviewed information contained within the record concerning the factual positions of the parties considered by the Courts below. Rule 52 clearly allows the Court of Appeals, on review of a District Court judgment, to assume an implied finding of fact consistent with the judgment, so long as there is evidence to support the implied finding. See *Zack v. Commissioner*, 291 F.3d 407, 412 (6th Cir. 2002); and *Century Marine, Inc. v. United States*, 153 F.3d 225, 231 (5th Cir. 1998). Such

action by the Sixth Circuit in this case does not warrant granting a petition for writ of certiorari.

E. Any split among the Circuits in applying exceptions to waiver rules, was previously recognized in *Thomas v. Arn*.

Petitioner asserts that this Court should grant a Rule 10 for certiorari because there is a split among the Circuits in applying exceptions to the waiver rules enforced by those Circuits. This Court, in *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. at 147, clearly found that the Sixth Circuit's decision to require the filing of objections is supported by sound consideration of judicial economy. The filing of objections to a Magistrate's Report enables the District Judge to focus his attention on those issues—factual and legal—that are at the heart of the parties' dispute. This Court further found that the Sixth Circuit's rule, by precluding appellate review of any issue not contained in objections, prevents a litigant from "sandbagging" the District Judge by failing to object and then appealing. *Id.*, 474 U.S. at 148. Absent such rule, any issue before the Magistrate would be a proper subject for appellate review. This would either force the Court of Appeals to consider claims that were never reviewed by the District Court, or force the District Court to review every issue in every case, no matter how thorough the Magistrate's analysis, and even if both parties were satisfied with the Magistrate's report.

This Court adequately considered in *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. at 146, fn. 4, the arguments addressed by Petitioner that other Circuits may have adopted waiver rules which are somewhat different. This Court previously reviewed the waiver rules in the First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Ninth and Eleventh Circuits in *Thomas v. Arn* and determined that

the power of the Courts of Appeals to mandate “procedures deemed desirable from the viewpoint of sound judicial practice, although in no wise commanded by statute or by the Constitution, would occur without violation of due process of law. *Id.* at 146. The application of the waiver rule of the Sixth Circuit in this case does not part from this Court’s previous ruling in *Thomas v. Arn*, and does not warrant the granting of a petition for writ of certiorari in this case.

F. There was no arbitrary application of Sixth Circuit waiver exceptions which would warrant any grant of certiorari.

The petitioners assert that a conflict exists within the Sixth Circuit in the application of the waiver provision “in the interest of justice” between *Kelley v. Withrow*, 25 F.3d 363, 366 (6th Cir. 1994), cert. denied, 513 U.S. 1061 (1994), *Kent v. Johnson*, 821 F.2d 1220, 1223 (6th Cir. 1987) and *Patterson v. Mintzes*, 717 F.2d 284 (6th Cir. 1983). Any conflicts of decisions within the Sixth Circuit may clearly be resolved by the Court below and do not establish any “compelling reason” to grant this petition under Supreme Court Rule 10.

There is no material difference in the legal analysis used by the Sixth Circuit in any of these cases to determine whether to apply a waiver “in the interest of justice.” *Kelley* held merely that incorporating other documents by reference might be adequate to specify the objections to the magistrate judge’s report and could be considered sufficient under the “interest of justice” exception to satisfy the requirements of the rule. *Kelley* cited with approval the *Kent* case. *Id.* at 366.

The *Kent* case accepted the plaintiff’s affidavit that he had not received a copy of the magistrate’s report mailed on June

29, 1984 until July 10, 1984 (the 11th day). Even then the objections were mailed on July 13, only one day late. Additionally the District Court had entered judgment prematurely before the ten days ran. Moreover, the Sixth Circuit felt that the case presented questions of considerable constitutional import. The Sixth Circuit properly exercised its discretion to excuse a default *in the interest of justice* (emphasis in original, 521 F.2d 1220, at 1223 citing *Thomas v. Arn*).

The *Patterson* case was decided by the Sixth Circuit in 1983 before the holding of *Thomas v. Arn*; however, its decision is not inconsistent therewith to the objection to the Magistrate's Report filed on the twelfth day. The Sixth Circuit noted that the District Court had good cause to extend the ten (10) day period of 636(b)(1) to file objections to the Magistrate's Report. *Id.* at p. 287, citing the enlargement provisions of Rule 6(b) of the *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure*.

The ruling of the Sixth Circuit in the present case is not a departure from the accepted as usual course of judicial proceedings which would justify an exercise of this Court's supervisory power under Supreme Court Rule 10.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth in this response, this Court should deny the Petition for Writ of Certiorari and affirm the judgment of the Court of Appeals and the District Court in this matter. The action of the Sixth Circuit below was consistent with the holding of this Court in *Thomas v. Arn* and does not merit further review.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX 1

**United States District Court for the Eastern
Division of Tennessee at Chattanooga**

Case No. 1:02-CV-385

[Filed May 14, 2004]

TONYA HARRIS, an administratrix of)
the estate of TORRIS HARRIS,)
Plaintiff)
)
v.)
)
THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, <i>et al.</i> ,)
Defendants)
)

Judge Curtis L. Collier

ORDER

For the reasons stated in the accompanying memorandum, the Court **REJECTS** Defendants' objections to Magistrate Judge Carter's Order of April 8, 2004 (Court File Nos. 99, 103); **DENIES** Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration (Court File No. 93); **DECLARES** an attorney lien in favor of Plaintiff's former counsel, Attorney Robin Ruben Flores (Court File No. 91); **GRANTS** Defendants leave to deposit with the Clerk of Court the funds subject to the disputed

settlement agreement pending the final disposition of Plaintiff's appeal; and GRANTS Plaintiff's application to proceed *in forma pauperis* with the condition that upon being ordered to pay any funds out to Plaintiff, the Clerk of Court shall withhold \$105 from such amount to cover the applicable filing fees.

SO ORDERED.

ENTER:

/s/ _____

CURTIS L. COLLIER
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

APPENDIX 2

**United States District Court for the Eastern
Division of Tennessee at Chattanooga**

Case No. 1:02-CV-385

[Filed May 14, 2004]

TONYA HARRIS, an administratrix of)
the estate of TORRIS HARRIS,)
Plaintiff,)
)
v.)
)
THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, <i>et al.</i> ,)
Defendants.)
)

MEMORANDUM

Before the Court are a variety of pending motions which the Court will address in a single Order. Plaintiff Tonya Harris ("Plaintiff") has filed a motion for reconsideration of the Court's Order dated March 3, 2003 (Court File No. 93), former counsel for Plaintiff has filed a motion for declaration of an attorney lien (Court File No. 91), and Defendants City of Chattanooga and Martin Penny have filed an objection to an Order entered by the Magistrate Judge William B. Carter denying Defendant Charles Kinsey's previous motion to strike Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration (Court File No. 99)

which Kinsey adopted (Court File No. 103). Additionally, Plaintiff filed a notice of appeal (Court File No. 94), and an application to proceed *in forma pauperis* on appeal (Court File No. 95). Defendants Kinsey and David Allen filed responses to Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration (Court File Nos. 101, 104) but Plaintiff has not replied or filed responses to the other pending motions. For the reasons set forth below, the Court will **REJECT** Defendants' objections to Magistrate Judge Carter's Order of April 8, 2004; **DENY** Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration; **DECLARE** an attorney lien in favor of Attorney Flores; and **GRANT** Plaintiff's application to proceed *in forma pauperis* on appeal subject to certain conditions.

I. RELEVANT FACTS

Plaintiff Tonya Harris ("Plaintiff") brought this action on behalf of her deceased son, Torris Harris ("Decedent"), seeking damages pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for Defendants' alleged violations of Decedent's rights under the Fourth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution (Court File No. 1). Through a series of communications in December 2003, Plaintiff's former counsel, Robin Reuben Flores ("Attorney Flores"), reached an agreement with counsel for the various Defendants to settle this action and a related pending action in state court in exchange for the sum of \$28,500. However, on or before January 1, 2004, Plaintiff decided to reject this settlement agreement and Attorney Flores communicated his clients' wishes to counsel for Defendants and proceeded with the prosecution of the lawsuit. Defendants then filed various motions to enforce the settlement agreement (Court File Nos. 68, 72, 75, 80, 83). Magistrate Judge Carter held a hearing on the matter and issued a Report and Recommendation ("R&R") concluding Attorney Flores had apparent authority

to settle the case on Plaintiff's behalf and recommending the Court grant the Defendants' motions (Court File No. 89). Upon receiving no objections from the parties, the Court adopted the R&R and closed the case on March 3, 2004 (Court File No. 90).

Thereafter, Attorney Flores filed a motion to withdraw as counsel for Plaintiff (Court File No. 92) and a motion to declare an attorney lien (Court File No. 91). Plaintiff then filed a *pro se* motion for reconsideration of the Court's Order enforcing the settlement agreement (Court File No. 93), a notice of appeal from that Order (Court File No. 94), and an application to proceed *informa pauperis* on appeal (Court File No. 95). Defendant Kinsey filed a motion to strike Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration as *ex parte* and redundant (Court File No. 96). On April 8, 2004, Magistrate Judge Carter granted Attorney Flores' motion to withdraw and denied Defendant Kinsey's motion to strike (Court File No. 98).

II. DISCUSSION

The Court will address the various pending motions in turn, though not in chronological order.

A. Defendants' Objections to Magistrate's Ruling on Motion to Strike

Defendants City of Chattanooga, Penny, and Kinsey have objected to Magistrate Judge Carter's ruling on Kinsey's motion to strike Plaintiff's *pro se* motion for reconsideration by way of their own motions to reconsider (Court File Nos. 99, 103). When nondispositive matters have been referred to and decided by a magistrate judge, a party dissatisfied with the magistrate judge's ruling may make objection thereto within ten days of being served with a copy of such ruling and

the district court "shall modify or set aside any portion of the magistrate judge's order found to be clearly erroneous or contrary to law." Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(a). Review of factual determinations are governed by the clearly erroneous standard. *Young v. Construction Corp.*, 899 F. Supp. 39, 40 (D.N.H. 1995); *Jochims v. Isuzu Motors, Ltd.*, 151 F.R.D. 338, 340 (S.D. Iowa 1993). A magistrate judge's factual finding is clearly erroneous when it is contrary to the clear weight of the evidence or when it leaves the reviewing court with a definite and firm conviction a mistake has been committed. *Young*, 899 F. Supp. at 40. However, a magistrate judge's conclusions of law are reviewed under the more lenient "contrary to law" standard. *Id.*; *Jochims*, 151 F.R.D at 340; *Bryant v. Hilst*, 136 F.R.D. 487, 488 (D. Kan. 1991). The district court is empowered to modify or set aside any factual or legal ruling of a magistrate judge which does not survive application of the clearly erroneous or contrary to law standard of Rule 72(a). *Young*, 889 F. Supp. at 40.

On March 23, 2004, the Court received a letter from Plaintiff asking the Court to reconsider its March 3, 2004 Order adopting the R&R and enforcing the settlement agreement (Court File No. 93). The Court interpreted this letter as a motion for reconsideration and instructed the Clerk of Court to docket it as such. Kinsey filed a motion to strike Plaintiff's letter/motion on the grounds it was an improper *ex parte* communication with the Court and, in any event, was filed more than ten days after entry of the order sought to be reconsidered (Court File No. 96). Magistrate Judge Carter denied Kinsey's motion after finding Plaintiff's motion was not an *ex parte* communication because Plaintiff was unrepresented by counsel, having terminated Attorney Flores, and her letter indicated copies had been sent to all opposing counsel (Court File No. 98). Magistrate Judge Carter declined to consider the timeliness of Plaintiff's letter/motion,

indicating such matters would be dealt with by the Court in ruling directly upon the motion (*id.*).

Defendants now object to Magistrate Judge Carter's Order on the basis of its failure to reference the notice of appeal filed by Plaintiff and alleged failure of service upon the City and Penny until after Kinsey filed his motion to strike (Court File No. 99, ¶¶ 1-2). Thus, Defendants argue, Plaintiff's letter/motion is either untimely or seeks relief which the Court now has no jurisdiction to grant in light of Plaintiff's filing of a notice of appeal (*id.* ¶ 2). The Court will deal with any and all considerations regarding the timing of Plaintiff's letter/motion *infra* in conjunction with the merits of that motion. To the extent Defendants argue the Court lacks jurisdiction over Plaintiff's letter/motion, the Court notes Plaintiff's notice of appeal was filed in conjunction with her application to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Therefore, Plaintiff's notice of appeal does not become effective until either Plaintiff pays the required filing fees or the Court grants her application for pauper status. Because neither event has yet occurred, the Court retains jurisdiction over all matters. Accordingly, the Court will **REJECT** Defendants' objections to Magistrate Judge Carter's denial of Kinsey's motion to strike.

B. Plaintiff's Motion for Reconsideration

Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration asks the Court to revisit its March 3, 2004 Order adopting the R&R and enforcing the settlement agreement. Plaintiff alleges the settlement agreement was "procured with fraud and deception" by her former attorney "against [her] wishes and without [her] approval" (Court File No. 93). Because Plaintiff's motion was not filed within ten days of the entry of the Court's Order granting summary judgment in favor of

Defendant, the period during which a motion to alter or amend under Fed. R. Civ. P. 59(e) must be filed, the Court deems Plaintiff's motion to be a motion for relief from judgment under Fed. R. Cir. P. 60(b). Rule 60(b) seeks to strike a balance between the needs of justice and the policy concerns favoring finality of judgments. *Wuliger v. Cohen*, 215 F.R.D. 535, 537 (N.D. Ohio 2003) (citing 12 James Wm. Moore, Moore's Federal Practice, § 60.0212], n. 6 (3d ed. 2002)). Thus, the Court may grant relief from a final judgment, order, or proceeding based upon:

(1) mistake, inadvertence, surprise, or excusable neglect; (2) newly discovered evidence which by due diligence could not have been discovered in time to move for a new trial under Rule 59(b); (3) fraud (whether heretofore denominated intrinsic or extrinsic), misrepresentation, or other misconduct of an adverse party; (4) the judgment is void; (5) the judgment has been satisfied, released, or discharged, or a prior judgment upon which it is based has been reversed or otherwise vacated, or it is no longer equitable that the judgment should have prospective application; or (6) any other reason justifying relief from the operation of the judgment. Fed. R. Civ. P. 60(b). Although motions under Rule 60(b) are addressed to the discretion of the Court, the Court's inquiry is limited to determining whether one of the specified circumstances exists such that the plaintiff is entitled to reopen the merits of his or her underlying claims. *See Feathers v. Chevron U.S.A., Inc.*, 141 F.3d 264, 268 (6th Cir. 1998). A Rule 60(b) motion is not a means by which to relitigate the case, a substitute for an appeal, or a "technique to avoid the consequences of decisions deliberately made yet later revealed to be unwise." *Hopper v. Euclid Manor*

Nursing Home, Inc., 867 F.2d 291,294 (6th Cir. 1989); *Mayhew v. Gusto Records, Inc.*, 2003 WL 21525106 at *2 (6th Cir. Jul. 2, 2003) (unpublished opinion) (citing *Mastini v. Am. Tel. & Tel. Co.*, 369 F.2d 378, 379 (2d Cir. 1966)).

Of the six circumstances justifying relief from judgment under Rule 60(b), only subsections (3) and (6) appear to be invoked by Plaintiff. However, the facts of Plaintiff's case do not warrant relief under either provision. Plaintiff generally alleges fraud and deceit on the part of attorney Flores, but Rule 60(b)(3) only provides for relief on the basis of "fraud,... misrepresentation, or other misconduct of an adverse party." Because Plaintiff's attorney was not an adverse party, Rule 60(b)(3) has no application to his alleged actions.

Rule 60(b)(6), which allows relief for "any other reason justifying relief," is properly invoked only in "unusual and extreme situations where principles of equity mandate relief." *Ollie v. Henry & Wright Corp.*, 910 F.2d 357, 365 (6th Cir. 1990) (emphasis in original). "Courts have stressed... 60(b)(6) should be used only in exceptional or extraordinary circumstances..., and can be used only as a residual clause in cases which are not covered under the first five subsections of Rule 60(b)." *Pierce v. United Mine Workers of America Welfare and Retirement Fund*, 770 F.2d 449, 451 (6th Cir. 1985), cert. denied, 474 U.S. 1104, 106 S. Ct. 890, 88 L. Ed. 2d 925 (1986). Thus, district courts may employ their discretion "to achieve substantial justice when 'something more' than one of the grounds contained in Rule 60(b)'s first five clauses is present." *Hopper*, 867 F.2d at 294.

Plaintiff's circumstances, while undoubtedly frustrating and emotional, do not amount to the unusual or extreme

situation contemplated by Rule 60(b)(6). Plaintiff's contentions and representations regarding Attorney Flores' actions and her own state of mind do not call into question either the R&R or the Court's previous Order enforcing the settlement agreement. The Court entered the Order enforcing the settlement agreement upon concurring with Magistrate Judge Carter's conclusion attorney Flores had apparent authority to settle Plaintiff's case on her behalf. Whether or not attorney Flores had *actual* authority to do so has no impact on liability as between Plaintiff and the various Defendants. At this point, Plaintiff's only recourse lies in a separate action against attorney Flores. Accordingly, the Court will DENY Plaintiff's motion for reconsideration.

C. Attorney Flores' Motion to Declare Attorney Lien

In connection with his motion to withdraw as counsel for Plaintiff, attorney Flores filed a motion to declare an attorney lien in his favor "on any amounts in settlement or judgment in this case pursuant to a contract of employment between Plaintiff and [Attorney Flores] for expenses, and attorneys fees" (Court File No. 91). Tennessee law provides "[a]ttorneys and solicitors of record who begin a suit shall have a lien upon the plaintiff's or complainant's right of action from the date of the filing of the suit." Tenn. Code Ann. § 23-2-102. This lien "attaches to any proceeds flowing from a judgment, as long as the lawyer worked to secure that judgment for the client." *Starks v. Browning*, 20 S.W.3d 645, 651 (Tenn. Ct. App. 1999). Although attorney's fees arrangements are contracts governed by state law, "the federal court's interest in fully and fairly resolving the controversies before it requires courts to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over fee disputes that are related to the main action." *Kalyawongsa v. Moffett*, 105 F.3d 283, 287-88 (6th Cir. 1997). Thus, under Tennessee law, a court having jurisdiction over an action,

whether state or federal, may declare the existence of an attorney's lien. *Id.* at 288; *Schmitt v. Smith*, 118 S.W.3d 348, 351-52 (Tenn. 2003). Therefore, the Court will **DECLARE** attorney Flores shall hold a lien on the proceeds of the settlement in Plaintiff's favor, but the Court takes no action regarding the enforcement of that lien.

D. Disposition of Funds

Defendants City of Chattanooga and Penny have requested they be permitted to deposit the settlement funds with the Court pending the outcome of these proceedings and any appeal which is taken by Plaintiff (Court File No. 99, ¶ 4). There having been no objection to this request, the Court **GRANTS** Defendants leave to deposit the \$28,500 provided for by the disputed settlement agreement with the Clerk of Court pursuant to Rule 67.

E. Matters Relating to Plaintiff's Appeal

The final issue to be addressed is whether Plaintiff should be allowed to appeal the Court's March 3, 2004 Order *in forma pauperis*. Plaintiff has filed an application seeking pauper status on appeal (Court File No. 95) which the Court finds demonstrates she is sufficiently indigent to warrant the waiver of fees on appeal. Accordingly, the Court will **GRANT** Plaintiff's application and **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to transmit Plaintiff's appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit without requiring Plaintiff to first pay the applicable fees. However, the Court notes Plaintiff has access to a potentially significant asset in the form of the funds from the disputed settlement agreement. Therefore, if and when the Clerk of Court is ordered to distribute the funds from the settlement agreement to Plaintiff, the Clerk of Court shall withhold the \$105 in filing fees

required by 28 U.S.C. §§ 1913 and 1917. In the event Plaintiff prevails on appeal and is able to obtain a reversal of the Court's Order enforcing the settlement agreement, she will not be required to pay those fees.

An Order shall enter.

/s/

CURTIS L. COLLIER
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE